

ECO AMERICORPS NEWSLETTER

October 2019

Volume 5 Issue 1

In this Issue

Orientation Reflections

ECO Events

Why ECO?

Alumni Spotlight

Acknowledgements

Greetings,

We are in our fifth year of operation and are consistently astounded by the connections this program is generating and the value ECO AmeriCorps continues to bring to Vermont communities. Each year, 24 members have hit the ground running to serve host organizations around the state. They each dedicate 11-months to water quality, waste reduction or environmental outreach/education projects.



Since the start of our program in 2015, our members have managed countless projects and together we have successfully:

- Improved **114 miles** of rivers and trails
- Improved **1,314 acres** of public & conserved land
- Educated **12,405 individuals** on environmental stewardship

We would like to thank our friends in the community (near and far) who believe in the mission of ECO AmeriCorps and have helped our small but mighty program take root and flourish in a time when environmental leadership and stewardship is needed more than ever.

It is a pleasure to serve with you,

Carey & Dustin

Orientation

We had the privilege of welcoming the new ECO members to Vermont at the Knoll Farm Refuge in Waitsfield. Surrounded by blueberry bushes and Icelandic sheep, we prepared for the busy year of service to come.

"Looking out over the valley and mountains beyond, I felt a calmness so complete that I couldn't, in that moment, imagine being anywhere else. A sense of peace washed over me; I noticed myself breathing more fully, trying to soak up as much as I could...and the serenity lasted the entire length of my stay. We could not have asked for a more majestic, inspiring location to welcome us to the state of Vermont, and remind us of just how amazing our natural environment is.

~Ryan Kincaid,
Batten Kill Watershed-CISMA



"I could not imagine a better location to introduce us to the ecosystem and state we would be serving. Although I still have much to figure out, I left orientation more confident that I want to devote my life to protecting the environment. Every person I had the privilege to encounter instilled in me a sense of urgency as well as excitement to begin my service as an environmental leader. It was clear that my fellow ECO members and I are all much needed and appreciated. I felt touched and grateful to know that so many people were more than happy to go out of their way to support and encourage us in whatever capacity they could. I left the farm feeling a strengthened sense of purpose and hope for the future."

~Meaghan Hickey
Lake Champlain Sailing Center



ECO Events

National Public Lands Day



In honor of National Public Lands Day on September 28th, the ECO crew met at Shelburne Farms in Shelburne, VT to help out with harvesting and preparing pastures. While a small group was helping harvest vegetables in their Market Garden, another crew tackled the clearing of Japanese Knotweed and aiding in the preparation of a silvo-pasture project. This project is a new agroforestry technique that combines trees, plants, and animals to maximize ecosystem health. Following our service, we piled into a hay wagon and were given a comprehensive farm tour and talk by Marshall Webb, who's family built and maintains the property.

Regional Gatherings



Our first gathering was held on October 11th, in Plainfield, VT. We met for a morning hike to the fire tower on top of Spruce Mountain in the L.R. Jones State Forest paired with a rundown on the iNaturalist media platform from one of our members serving in citizen science at Vermont Center for Ecostudies. After taking in the fall colors and views from the top of the fire tower, we headed back down to Cate's Farm to glean tomatoes with Community Harvest of Central Vermont. Together, we gleaned almost 2,100 pounds of tomatoes in one afternoon!



On October, 18th, we met our Northern crew at the Intervale Center in Burlington, VT. We banded together to weed tree beds in the Intervale's Conservation Nursery to clear the way for the various species of saplings growing. After a team lunch, we were given a tour around the property that is open to the public all year and learned of the history of the site. We then regrouped and received an entertaining presentation on composting by one of our in-house, member experts.



Why ECO?

Our members come from all different states, cultures, backgrounds, and experiences. Every member has a different story of how and why they joined ECO. As we begin our 5th service year, “Why ECO” is a story we want to highlight as a program. Ryan Kincaid is currently serving in Bennington, VT with the Batten Kill Watershed CISMA as their Watershed Steward. Originally from New York, Ryan has eagerly embraced all the opportunities ECO and her service has offered in the first couple weeks of service.

Why was ECO the right next step for you?

I had a nagging feeling that being a classroom teacher was not what I was meant to be doing; I wanted to find a position that would take me outside more frequently, and would provide me with an opportunity to assist with or create hands-on eco activities. Having taught for 5 years and then spending one at an organization supporting people with disabilities though, meant that much of my most recent work history wasn't closely related to what I wanted to do. I applied for a number of environmental positions, but was disconnected from the world of environmental conservation and lacked the field experience needed to be successful. Pair that with a love of Vermont and desire to pay off some of my school loans, and ECO seemed like the perfect choice! I had heard of AmeriCorps, and loved the community service aspect, as well as the mentoring/training/professional development component, and I've contemplated living in Vermont for years, so I was thrilled to get involved with an opportunity that would help me accomplish so many of my goals all at once! Furthermore, I could tell that the supportive nature of the ECO AmeriCorps staff would assist me as I tried to narrow my scope and figure out where I wanted to go after the program.

"I think I'm meant to do *something great*.
I'm ready to find out what that is"



Why ECO?

What Individual Service Projects have you been involved in, and how are they impacting your service thus far with ECO?

“I have logged Independent Service Hours with Empty Bowls, which gets the community involved in making creative, usable pottery which will be sold to raise money for, and awareness about, hunger; I’ve volunteered at a pancake breakfast put on by the Lions Club to assist children suffering from cancer; plus, I went to The Intervale in Burlington to help with bare root (tree) pruning. I am grateful that AmeriCorps both allows and encourages its members to get involved in their local communities. Doing so has already helped me feel like I belong, and introduced me to countless people that I wouldn’t have met otherwise. I anticipate even more overlap as I continue my service term – with possible inclusion of people I’ve met in educational and invasive removal opportunities that I’m coordinating. Plus, each experience has built my network of connection with the local area, and in turn, introduced me to even more opportunities and activities in which I can participate.”

What are you most excited about looking forward? What are you hoping to get out of ECO?

“The thing that I am most excited about is **what I can learn this year** – about native plant identification and seed collection, how to effectively remove non-native invasive plants and why we should, as well as what is being done in the environmental field in Vermont... I am limited by my lack of knowledge and it is easy to get discouraged by the enormity of the challenges we face, especially when one doesn’t know how to respond, but I am inspired by all of the people and organizations I’m discovering, which are collaborating for positive change. I can’t wait to learn more about the environmental field in general, as well as technical skills like GIS mapping and I hope to explore other interests such as wildlife rehabilitation and nature writing, as I figure out how best to use my gifts and strengths to love the environmental movement forward. In short, I expect nothing less from this year than to find my calling – that shouldn’t be too hard, right?”



Alumni Spotlight

Elizabeth Gribkoff

ECO Alumni 2015-2016

Elizabeth served as an ECO member in 2015-2016 as a part of the first cohort of ECO AmeriCorps in Vermont. She served in a split position as the Volunteer and Stewardship Coordinator for Watersheds United Vermont and the Vermont River Conservancy (VRC). In her role, she was charged with a wide range of responsibilities. With the Vermont River Conservancy, she served within the Conservation Stewardship program monitoring conservation easements around the state. But with Watersheds United Vermont, she managed communications and their volunteer programming. Although having her service split came with challenges, Elizabeth embraced the combination of field



and office tasks that were assigned to her. After her service, she took a part-time position as a paralegal and continued to explore opportunities before landing an internship with VTDigger in January of 2018. She quickly got offered a job with them, and is currently their Energy and Environment Reporter focusing on publishing stories surrounding Vermont's environmental issues.

From year one to year five, the program has experienced many changes and adjustments, but one thing that never varies is our dedication to the environment, our members and the impact we make around us.



Acknowledgements



Thank you to our community partners that have helped kick off the 2019-2020 service year. We want to thank Knoll Farm, Shelburne Farms, Community Harvest of Central Vermont, and The Intervale Center. We look forward to our continued service to the communities of Vermont!

Interested in getting involved, becoming a host organization, or community partner?

Visit our website at ecoamericorps.org

Follow Us!



[@ecoamericorps](https://www.instagram.com/ecoamericorps)



[@ecoamericorps](https://twitter.com/ecoamericorps)



[ECO AmeriCorps](https://www.facebook.com/ECO.AmeriCorps)

